

June 7, 2007

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon voted today in favor of legislation to expand stem cell research, while imposing ethical guidelines and increasing non-embryonic stem cell research. The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (S. 5), which has already passed the Senate, will allow federally-funded research projects to use embryonic stem cell lines donated from fertility clinics as long as it has already been determined that the cells would otherwise be destroyed. In addition, this bill authorizes alternative stem cell research - i.e., ways to obtain stem cells that have the same properties as embryonic stem cells that do not involve destroying embryos.

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"Stem cell research offers hope to millions of Americans who are suffering from debilitating diseases like Multiple Sclerosis, Alzheimer's and juvenile diabetes," said Rep. Melancon. "I believe part of being pro-life is working to ease the pain and early death caused by these diseases. If you've ever seen someone with MS struggle to speak or walk, or watched a child with diabetes give himself an insulin shot, or cared for a parent suffering from Alzheimer's, you understand why we must support every ethical and promising avenue of medical research that might bring us closer to a cure for these diseases."

According to scientists, including 80 Nobel Laureates, embryonic stem cell research has the potential to unlock the doors to treatments and cures to numerous diseases, including diabetes, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's, Lou Gehrig's disease, multiple sclerosis, cancer, and spinal cord injuries. More than 100 million Americans suffer from diseases such as these.

The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act would expand the federal funding of embryonic stem cell research by lifting the restrictions on the embryonic stem cell lines that can be used for federally-funded research. According to the National Institutes of Health, most of the stem cell lines authorized for federally-funded research under the President's policy are now no longer useful for research.

However, the bill only authorizes federal research funds for stem cell lines generated from embryos that would otherwise be discarded by fertility clinics. Specifically, the bill allows federal funding of embryonic stem cell research only if the following requirements have been met: 1) Embryos used to derive stem cells were originally created for fertility treatment purposes and are in excess of fertility treatment needs; 2) The individuals seeking fertility treatments for whom the embryos were created have determined that the embryos "would never be implanted in a woman and would otherwise be discarded;" and 3) The individuals seeking fertility treatments must have "donated the embryos with written informed consent and without receiving any financial or other inducements to make the donation."

The bill requires the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services to submit an annual report to the appropriate committees of Congress on the embryonic stem cell research authorized under the bill that has been conducted during the previous fiscal year, including a description of how HHS has ensured that all federally-funded research complies with the bill's strict ethical guidelines.

Rep. Melancon continued, **"I believe life is sacred, and I will oppose any bill that allows human cells to be created just to be destroyed in a lab. This bill prohibits that horrible practice by allowing only cells that would otherwise be destroyed to be used for federally-funded research - research that has enormous potential for finding cures to numerous diseases and saving lives."**

Yesterday, Rep. Melancon voted against a bill that failed to prohibit all cloning of human cells. In explaining his vote, Rep. Melancon said, **"I and most Americans believe that the United States needs a comprehensive ban on cloning to create human embryos, regardless of what they might be used for. Many other countries - including France, Germany and Canada - already have such a ban. The United States needs to catch up and once and for all ban this nightmarish practice of cloning human life."**

The bill is supported by more than 500 organizations, including the American Medical Association, AARP, Association of American Medical Colleges, and Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, as well as many faith-based groups.

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